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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART (PUBLIC)* OF THE 155th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 8 November 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. VOYAME

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* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as document CAT/C/SR.155/Add.1.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

STATEMENT BY THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

1. The CHAIRMAN welcomed Mr. Ibrahima Fall, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights.

2. Mr. FALL (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights) said that, as was customary, he wished to pass on to the Committee some information about important events which had occurred since the end of its previous session and which directly concerned its sphere of activity. He announced that, since that session, the number of States parties to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment had risen from 72 to 78 with the accession of Armenia, Antigua and Barbuda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Morocco, Slovakia and Slovenia.

3. The new Special Rapporteur on torture of the Commission on Human Rights had continued to receive an alarming number of communications reporting cases of torture. Since the beginning of the current year, he had transmitted some 60 urgent appeals concerning individuals alleged to have been tortured and had sent letters to some 30 Governments informing each one of the allegations of torture received by him and which concerned it. Detailed information on the activities of the Special Rapporteur in the course of the year would appear in his next report to the Commission on Human Rights, which would be published in January 1994.

4. With regard to the activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, during its twelfth session in April, the Board of Trustees had examined information concerning 135 projects and subprojects, as well as requests for grants for ongoing and new projects in 1993 and 1994. On behalf of the Secretary-General, he had approved the recommendations by the Board of Trustees for the funding of 67 projects in 50 countries to relieve the suffering of tens of thousands of victims, by providing them with medical or psychological support, opportunities for social or economic reintegration and legal and financial assistance. Although the financial situation of the Fund had improved that year thanks to the positive responses of several Governments to the fund-raising campaign launched in 1992 by the Board of Trustees, additional resources were needed if the fund was to meet the ever-growing demands that had exceeded $4 million in 1992-1993.

5. Another subject of direct concern to the activities of the Committee was the drafting of an optional protocol to the Convention against Torture. The Working Group entrusted with elaborating the text of that protocol had held its second session in Geneva from 25 October to 5 November 1993. Mr. Sorensen, designated as the Committee's observer in the Working Group would certainly report on the outcome of that session to the Committee. Due to recent financial constraints faced by the United Nations, Mr. Sorensen had, unfortunately, not been able to participate in all the activities of the Working Group.

6. Turning to the activities recently undertaken by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which had met in Geneva from 27 September to 1 October 1993, he announced that the Working Group had dealt with more

than 500 cases submitted mainly by non-governmental organizations and individuals. An evaluation of those cases had led the Working Group to conclude that the abuse of states of emergency was a major source of arbitrary arrests. It had also criticized the excessive renewal of periods of detention without subsequent conviction of the accused as well as the misuse of criminal charges. The Working Group had also expressed its concern about the abusive establishment of special or emergency courts which were increasingly being used to try dissidents and opponents who were then denied the right to be heard by an independent and impartial tribunal. At its previous session, the Working Group had also received allegations of ill-treatment and torture during detention and had decided to transmit those cases to the Special Rapporteur on torture of the Commission on Human Rights. The Working Group would hold its next session in December and would report on its activities to the fiftieth session of the Commission.

7. At the World Conference on Human Rights, held at Vienna from 14 to 25 June 1993, the Committee had been represented by Mr. Sorensen, its spokesman, and by Mr. Ben Ammar and Mr. Burns. In his report on the work of the United Nations (A/48/221), issued in September 1993, the Secretary-General had pointed out that the Conference had been a turning-point in United Nations activities for the promotion and protection of human rights. The Conference had been the culmination of three years of intense activity by all segments of the international community directed at reviewing past progress in the protection of human rights, identifying obstacles to further progress and charting the course of action for the coming years.

8. The Vienna Conference had reaffirmed the universality of fundamental human rights and had recalled that the human person, as the central subject of human rights, should also be the principal beneficiary and participate actively in the realization of such rights. The Conference had also recognized the right to development as a human right and the mutually reinforcing interrelationships between democracy, development and respect for human rights, as well as the need to assist developing countries in their democratization process. The Vienna Conference had also stressed the need to eliminate all discrimination based on race and similar factors.

9. In the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the Conference had welcomed the increase in ratification of the Convention against Torture and had encouraged its speedy ratification by all member States. It had reaffirmed that efforts to eradicate torture should be concentrated on prevention and had called for the early adoption of an optional protocol to the Convention to allow regular visits to places of detention. It had also recommended that States should abrogate legislation leading to impunity for those responsible for torture.

10. In addition, specific recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of United Nations activities and mechanisms had been made to the Conference by the representatives of international and human rights treaty bodies. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the statement of those bodies were brought to the attention of the Committee at its current session. Further, the Secretariat had elaborated a series of concrete measures and

proposals which would also be brought to the attention of the Committee, including proposals for increases in the resources of the Centre so that the Programme of Action adopted at Vienna could be effectively implemented in the years ahead.

11. He wished to thank once again those members of the Committee who actively participated in various projects of the programme of advisory services and technical assistance of the Centre, particularly the Chairman of the Committee and Mr. Lorenzo who were making valuable contributions in respect of projects by the Centre in Romania and Guatemala. Finally, he reaffirmed his readiness to assist the Committee in every possible way in carrying out its important duties.

12. The CHAIRMAN thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights for his statement and for his contribution to the work of the Committee.

The public meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.